Patent Application of

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for

TITLE: PLACEMAT WITH PROTECTIVE BUMPER AND ACCESSORY RESTRAINT SYSTEM

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

Not applicable

BACKGROUND – FIELD OF INVENTION

This invention relates to placemats, particularly for use by children when dining, specifically adding new functionality.

BACKGROUND – DESCRIPTION OF PRIOR ART

When children are seated in chairs at restaurants, they are often seated at a level lower than desired and they often lean over the chair into the hard, sharp edge of the table. In the past, parents or guardians were required to diligently observe the child to ensure against injury on a hard table edge or surface, greatly reducing an opportunity of enjoying the meal, social atmosphere and dining companions. Prior art, US Patent 6116162 to Santa Cruz et al (2000), attempted to solve this problem by providing a bumper of sorts, but the prior art allowed the removal of the bumper padding, allowing the opportunity for the padding to be loosened, removed or lost, eliminating the bumper capability.

Because of the multitudes of table types and thicknesses, a means of attachment to the table must accommodate varying thicknesses. Based upon prior art, US Patent 6116162 to Santa Cruz et al (2000) description, figures, preferred materials, and proposed embodiments, one can observe that the proposed J-shaped "inserts" adversely limit the thickness of the table that the prior art can accommodate.

Because children may resist the use or desire to remove the placemat system, it is desirable to create a highly frictional relationship between the placemat and the table. Though prior art, US Patent 6116162 to Santa Cruz et al (2000) cover material of choice, vinyl, provides some friction against movement, it is neither addressed nor suggested to be designed specifically to overcome such an issue.

Understanding that a caregiver in charge of a child most often has numerous toys and supplies to transport, it is desirable to minimize the opportunity to lose parts of an apparatus. The "slidably...remove[able]" inserts in prior art, US Patent 6116162 to Santa Cruz et al (2000), are able to be lost or broken when not inserted in their the respective slots. The loss or breakage of these key apparatus would render the prior art placemat unusable.

As mentioned above, for the sake of feeding and entertaining children, many toys, books and feeding accessories are transported. Often, when a child is given an object, it is played with then deposited on the floor. No prior art has addressed the issue of restraining the accessories of a child, keeping them suspended or removed from undesirable surfaces.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this placemat is to provide an accessory restraint system that is adjustable but securely fastenable, and provides a sanitary surface as well as an edge bumper.

OBJECTS AND ADVANTAGES

Several objects and advantages of this placemat are:

(a) to provide means of attaching a plurality of links (prior art) or other tether system, of any suitable material or design, to the invention and subsequently removeably attaching any children's accessories;

(b) to provide fasteners, able to: attach to but avoid structural or decorative elements of the furnishing, adapt to uneven surfaces, and accommodate a plurality of furnishing thicknesses;

(c) to provide a plurality of gripping surfaces of traction-providing material, able to resist the horizontal pull of the user;

(d) while having moveable parts, to be designed to remain assembled at all times, eliminating the opportunity to lose parts;

(e) to, while remaining as one object, be collapsible for easy transport and storage;

(f) to provide in combination a protective bumper and placemat that is reusable, water-resistant, made from non-toxic materials and is able to be cleaned;

(g) to provide a bumper, placemat and restraint system that is removeably attachable to substantially any suitable table of choice, including various shaped tables, either geometric or amorphous in shape;

(h) to provide, in combination, a protective bumper, placemat and accessory restraint system wherein the cover member is substantially made from any suitable material of choice, such as vinyl or the like, which is washable, non-toxic, water-resistant, etc.;

(i) to provide a bumper that includes any suitable cushioning of choice therein, such as any typical padding that is non-toxic and washable, or the like;

(j) to provide a means to adjustably, both horizontally and vertically, attach and removeably affix the placemat to the table;

(k) to provide substantial protection for the table;

(l) to provide substantially a sanitary eating surface;

(m) to alleviate any hard or sharp edges or protrusions of the existing table that may injure the user;

(n) to be of sufficient size to cover substantially at least a portion of the table within arms reach of a child when seated at the table;

(o) to provide a user-friendly, reliably constructed, placemat, easily adapted to most any dining table or eating surface.

Still further objects and advantages will become apparent from a consideration of the ensuing description and drawings.

DRAWING FIGURES

Figure 1A is a sectional view of the placemat.

Figure 2A is an overhead view of the placemat when coiled.

Figure 3A is a sectional view when the placemat is coiled.

Figure 4A is a view from behind, looking at the inner side of the placemat.

Figure 5A is a view from the front, looking at the bumper portion and adjustable knobs.

Figure 6A is an overhead view of the placemat when attached to a surface.

Figure 7A is a side view of the accessory restraint system using prior art accessories.

Figure 1B is a view from behind, looking at the inner side of the placemat and power button.

Figure 2B is a side view of the accessory restraint system identifying the battery compartment.

REFERENCE NUMERALS IN DRAWINGS

6	(prior art) table	24	knob
8	(prior art) links	26	screw
10	slats	28	grip
11	mat	30	arm
12	frictional backing	32	bumper covering
14	loops	40	(prior art) drink insulator
16	c-shaped base	42	(prior art) toy
18	bumper	44	(prior art) suction cup
20	pin	46	power button
22	pin grommets	48	battery compartment

DESCRIPTION – FIGURES 1A THROUGH 7A - PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

The preferred embodiment of the present invention is illustrated in Figures 1 through Figure 7.

The mat **11** is composed of multiple slats **10**, permanently attached to the frictional backing **12**, butted so tightly together that when as shown (Fig 1), the slats **10** create a surface that appears without any open joints or cracks.

Two loops **14** are located on the left and right sides of the mat surface, functioning in a way so that prior art links **8** may be attached to them. The c-shaped base **16** is made of a thickness such that its thickness plus the thickness of the frictional backing **12** will equal the same dimension as the depth of the slats **10** plus the frictional backing **12**, creating a smooth transition between parts. The height of the c-shaped base **16** is typically 3 inches. A washable bumper **18** is affixed to the c-shaped base **16**, of a thickness to shield a child from injury should impact occur between the child and the c-shaped base **16**.

A pin **20** requiring pressure to disengage it from the provided pin grommets **22** is provided to maintain the desired length of the adjustable arm **30**. The pin **20** is depressed thus allowing said arm **30** to move horizontally. A screw **26** with a frictional grip **28** at the end opposite the knob **24** is provided at the distal end of the arm **30**, to tighten against the prior art table **6**. By turning the knob **24** in a clockwise motion, the grip moves vertically upward to sandwich the table between the grip **28** and the frictional backing **12**.

OPERATION - PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

First, one unrolls the placemat allowing the mat **11** to be fully extended. The screws **20** are loosened by rotating the knobs **24** in a counter-clockwise direction to increase the distance of the grip **28** to the frictional padding **12** . Once the screws **26** and subsequently, the grips **28** have been adjusted to accept the depth of the table **6** between them, the c-shaped base **16** is slid horizontally, and pressed firmly against the table **6**. The screws **20** are tightened by rotating the knobs **24** in a clockwise direction to decrease the distance of the grip **28** from the table **6**.

If the table **6** has structural or decorative impediments to avoid and requires arm **30** extension, then pin **20** is depressed while arm **30** is adjusted in the desired direction by either pulling or pushing in a horizontal direction. The pin **20** will pop into an available grommet **22** to retain the desired arm **30** length.

To use the accessory restraint system, one attaches prior art links **8** through the loops **14**, linking and extending the prior art links **8** the desired length. The distal end of the length of prior art links **8** is then attached to the accessory of choice, such as prior art drink insulator **40** or prior art toy **42**.

To remove the placemat from the table **6**, the screws **20** are loosened by rotating the knobs **24** in a counter-clockwise direction to increase the distance of the grip **28** to the table **6**. The c-shaped base **16** is pulled horizontally from the edge of the table **6**. If desired, the bumper covering **32**, protecting the bumper **18**, may be wiped with a wet cloth for cleaning.

To store the placemat, beginning at one end of the mat **11** parallel with the table **6** edge, one rolls the slats **10** of the mat **11** toward the frictional backing **12**, coiling them until they cannot be coiled any further.

DESCRIPTION – FIGS 1B-2B - ALTERNATE EMBODIMENT

As an alternate embodiment, the mat **11** may be comprised of a singular surface, such as vinyl, with an integrated or mechanically incorporated frictional backing **12**. This mat may also utilize suction cups (prior art) **44** at the end most remote from the user in order to attach it more firmly to the existing table surface on which it is used.

The grips **28** of this embodiment may also be automated, closing tightly upon contact with the underside of the table surface, through the use of a battery operated power button **46**.

OPERATION - ALTERNATE EMBODIMENT

First, one unrolls the placemat allowing the mat **11** to be fully extended. The c-shaped base **16** is slid horizontally, and pressed firmly against the table **6.** Suction cups (prior art) **44** at the remote end of the mat would be adhered to the surface. The grips **28** are engaged with the underside of the table by pressing and holding the power button **46** the appropriate direction to decrease the distance of the grip **28** to the frictional padding **12.**

To remove the placemat from the table **6**, the grips **28** are loosened by pressing and holding the power button **46** the appropriate direction to increase the distance of the grip **28** to the table **6.** The suction cups (prior art) **44** are disengaged from the surface. The c-shaped base **16** is pulled horizontally from the edge of the table **6.** If desired, the bumper covering **32**, protecting the bumper **18**, may be wiped with a wet cloth for cleaning.

To store the placemat, beginning at one end of the mat **11** parallel with the table **6** edge, one rolls the mat **11** toward the frictional backing **12**, coiling it until it cannot be coiled any further.

CONCLUSION, RAMIFICATIONS AND SCOPE

Accordingly, the reader will see that the use of this placemat with protective bumper and accessory restraint system is simple and effective when used to protect against accidental bumps and injuries sustainable on the edge of a dining table or eating surface.

Furthermore, the placemat with protective bumper and accessory restraint system has additional advantages in that

- it provides a sanitary eating surface;
- it provides a non-removable padding that cannot be lost, which would diminish the usefulness;
- it can accommodate varying thicknesses of surfaces to which it may be attached;
- its frictional surface backing and table-depth adjustable grips overcome the obstacle of children removing it while in use;
- its working apparatuses cannot be removed, thus avoiding loss that would render it unusable;
- it restrains children's accessories, keeping them from undesirable surfaces.

Although the description above is specific in many details, these are not to be used to limit the scope of the invention as they have been provided to explain further the features of the preferred embodiment. For example, the mat can be composed of other systems, not limited to the slatted version illustrated in the preferred embodiment drawings; the grips can be comprised of another system achieving the same result, such as a pin and grommet system, etc.

Thus, the scope of this invention should be realized by the attached claims and their legal equivalents, rather than solely by the examples given.